FAMILY MATTERS

YOUR CONNECTION TO THE MINISTRY OF CHILDREN & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT & OUR SERVICE PROVIDERS

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A Message from Rick Mowles,

Interim Chief Executive Officer for Community Living British Columbia

Rick Mowles

I am honoured to serve as the Interim Chief Executive Officer (ICEO) for Community Living British Columbia (CLBC). The next few months will be crucial ones as we move closer to the launch of CLBC this summer. My goal as ICEO is to ensure that when CLBC is established, a concrete foundation will have been built upon which the organization will continue to grow and thrive in the coming years.

Significant progress has and is being made daily in the planning for CLBC. The announcement in January of the new service delivery model was critical to moving forward. With that in place, we can now focus on:

- developing detailed plans for the implementation of the new structure;
- recruiting a strong senior management team;
- working with ministry staff on a sound human resource plan; and
- communicating our activities to individuals, families, service providers and communities.

The Board and I are committed to ensuring that there is no disruption to individuals, families, service providers and staff during the transfer of responsibility to CLBC. Throughout the spring, we will be focussing on plans to devolve services from government to the authority. The shifting of services toward the new delivery model will occur after July 1, 2005, and will be done in consultation with service providers and the community.

Recruitment is currently underway for a number of senior positions at the Vice President and Director level. It is my pleasure to welcome our two newest Executive members: Carol Goozh has joined us as Vice President of Quality Services and Operations, and Doug Woollard has accepted the position of Vice President of Community Planning and Development. I look forward to working closely with them over the next few months.

The knowledge and expertise of current CLS staff will be critical to our success. Over the past six weeks, I have been speaking to CLS staff across the province, and am extremely impressed with the enthusiasm and innovative ideas that they have shared. We are currently developing a strategy to ensure that CLS employees have the opportunity to be engaged in developing CLBC. Service providers will also play a vital role in the new organization, and we look forward to working in partnership with agencies to build a new service delivery system that better meets the needs of individuals and families in this province.

An exciting and historic time lies ahead - and with the advice and support of individuals, families, service providers, staff and the ministry, a new and vital organization is emerging that will build on the strengths of the past to create a brighter future for everyone.

For more info, please visit the IACLBC web site at: www.interimauthorityclbc.ca

BRITISH COLUMBIA

MINISTRY OF CHILDREN & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca

Surrey Court Project Earns Accolades

The first-annual Premier's Innovation and Excellence awards, held in November 2004, featured special recognition for MCFD. The Surrey Court Project, a collaborative initiative between the Ministry of Attorney General (AG) and MCFD, received the award in the Partnership category.

The project tackled the serious problem of court backlogs and delays in child protection mediation. The court process in child protection has historically been slow and complicated. Through mediation, disagreements can often be resolved more quickly and in a less adversarial manner than in the court system. And while child protection mediation has been available since 1997, it wasn't being well utilized.

"The uptake wasn't very high, in part because it's a voluntary process," says Irene Robertson, Executive Director of Early Childhood Development and Child Care Policy with MCFD. "The challenge we saw was taking another crack at making mediation a more viable option."

MCFD and the AG's office worked closely together to design an effective and viable process that works for families and social workers. The process begins with mediators meeting separately with family members and with social workers to help them prepare for mediation. At the core of the project is a facilitated planning meeting between the parents and social workers. A neutral third party, the mediator, facilitates the negotiations. A Court Work Supervisor (CWS), a new position created for the project, attends with the social workers, helps them negotiate an agreement and has the authority to agree to a negotiated settlement.

The creation of the CWS position was one of two key innovations of the project. "We wanted to be respectful of the workload of supervisors and team leaders by creating a position to support social workers in the mediation. For the first time there was a dedicated resource to support social workers in the process - a credible person with a long history in social work with the authority to agree to a settlement."

The other innovation was the orientation session for parents. Meeting with a mediator in advance provides parents with an opportunity to learn how the process works, how to ensure their concerns are addressed and helps them get to a place where they are ready to move forward.

The Surrey Court Project realized fantastic results. Under the project, 83% of cases saw all issues settled, 92% of all issues considered were settled, and only 14% of cases referred to mediation appeared in court for a contested Protection Hearing. Also, comparing the cases referred to mediation with cases from the same offices that were not referred, the project reduced by more than half the amount of time taken to make decisions about children.

"The results exceeded our expectations," Robertson says. "These results are among the highest that I'm aware of, particularly in the family law side."

Robertson credits the success of the Surrey Court Project to a strong spirit of collaboration and the dedication of team members. Robertson, in her previous role of Senior Policy Analyst with the Dispute Resolution Office represented the AG on the team. Other members included Catherine Pritchard, Linda Stewart, Liz Winkler, and Sheila Zeiner, all with MCFD. Jeanne Martins joined the team as the Project Coordinator, and Jean Macdonald and Linda Hayes-Newington, both now retired from MCFD, provided leadership for the project in the Fraser Region.

Currently, the program is only available in parts of MCFD's Fraser Region. But MCFD Deputy Minister Alison MacPhail says the project provides a great foundation for implementing similar programs across the province.

"I am really delighted with the results of this project. It highlights how collaboration between ministries can result in improvements to the system and better outcomes for children and families."

More information on the project is available at www.ag.gov.bc.ca/dro/child-protection/surrey-court/surrey-court-info.pdf

Integration is an Organic Process for New Centre

"It's nestled in the community, and it belongs to the community."

That's how Lori Messer describes the Sooke Child, Youth and Family Centre, which will celebrate its one-year anniversary this June. The facility offers integrated health and social services in a welcoming setting.

"There's a real feeling of ownership and pride in the building, and I think that the community feels that pride as well, because they've helped create it," Messer adds. She's the board chair of the Sooke Cooperative Association of Service Agencies (CASA).

Just last month, Sooke CASA became the first co-op in B.C. to receive charitable status, making it eligible for grants restricted to registered charities. Another benefit is the ability to provide charitable tax receipts to donors.

The Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children led the way in the centre's creation, raising the funds to build and decorate the 12,000-square-foot, $2.5 million building. Nine agencies share space in the building, a situation that provides many advantages. Both staff and clients have a better sense as to what services are available. And the design of the building promotes interaction. For example, there's a common waiting room in the middle of the building and people gather for coffee in the common kitchen.

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Integration is an Organic Process for New Centre cont'd...

The agencies and numerous community members helped design the building. Situated in a forest, the interior reflects its natural setting. The intent was to "bring the outside in," says Messer.

Douglas fir logs from the site support the building. First Nations artwork adorns the walls. Large boulders protrude out of the red concrete floor. Leaf and fern patterns decorate the walkways. The counters are natural wood. The feel of the entire place is organic.

Similarly organic is the way relationships are developing in the community centre. "In terms of integration in a formal sense, we haven't yet started to make policies to do that," says Messer. "We're waiting for people to discover opportunities in their own time."

The building itself drives programming. Staff see others doing things with their clients and this spurs ideas for their own clients. "We have this constant evolution of programming and ideas," Messer says. "It's very exciting."

Those opportunities are being discovered all the time. It all comes out of the staff's sense of sharing a purpose. The roots of the project go back several years. The development group started meeting four and a half years ago. MCFD got involved about three years ago. Years of detailed and often challenging planning have paid off.

"We took the biggest step forward when we said, 'What do we need to have in the building to serve families?' not, 'What do the agencies need to serve families in our building?'" Messer explains. "Once we did it from a programming, activity-specific basis rather than [an agency] basis, the building came together. It was magical."

Each agency stated its requirements in terms of space. Wherever possible, space was overlapped. In the end, more than half of the building became common and shared space.

Messer says the centre is constantly facing new challenges. There's a tangible sense that they're in uncharted territory. Staff have learned to take each challenge as it comes. It takes a lot of homework and dedication to make it all come together, she says. Service providers from other areas of the province have visited the site and left inspired.

"You can't do it just because it's something that is in vogue now," cautions Messer. "You have to really want to do it, because it's tremendously hard work on every level. We all have different ideas of what good practice is, and you really have to come up with some common values and a vision of how you want families to feel in the building."

Veronica Berlando is the MCFD Team Leader for Sooke Protective Family Services. She says sharing space has improved the working relationships of the service providers and the quality of service for clients. She says staff and clients also have a real sense of community, of belonging.

"When people walk into the building they're seeing community, not an institution."

For more information: www.queenalexandra.org/sooke_centre_opening.htm

The nine agencies comprising Sooke CASA are:

Edward Milne Community School Society

Ministry of Children and Family Development

Pacific Centre Family Services Association

Sooke Family Resource Society

Sooke Options for Community Living Association

Sooke Preschool Association

Sooke Transition House Society

Steps to the Future Child Care Society

Vancouver Island Health Authority

Investment and Interest Grows in Child Care

Program changes announced over the past few months, along with growing attention at the provincial and federal levels, makes child care a hot topic of late.

Some factors contributing to the attention being given to child care are public demand and the prospect of new funding. The topic got a major boost when Ken Dryden became the federal Social Development Minister and began to talk about a new funding commitment from the federal government of $5 billion over five years.

"Child care is in the news a great deal these days," says Karen Ayers, Acting Executive Director of Child Care Programs and Services with MCFD.

"We're hoping the federal government and the provinces reach an agreement very soon, as it will allow the province to make unprecedented investments in early learning and child care."

A federal/provincial funding agreement for child care is under negotiation. Child care has been part of MCFD since last July. The Ministry was already responsible for early childhood development, so child care was a natural fit with the ministry's programs and services for children and families. The idea is to improve coordination and make better use of the same stakeholders, networks, and communities.

On January 1, 2005, the income threshold at which families become eligible for child care subsidy was raised by $200. This $33 million boost means ten thousand more children are eligible for child care subsidy. Other changes provide new or enhanced subsidies – many of them at higher levels than ever before.

In February, an additional $1.5 million of one-time funding was announced for aboriginal and multicultural agencies, eligible early childhood education students, and organizations that train child care providers.

The 2004/05 budget for child care in BC is $182 million. The budget is increasing to $194 million in 2005/06 and the new federal agreement will increase it further.

"Especially for vulnerable kids, exposure to early childhood development activities in quality childcare substantially improves their literacy skills, school readiness, and overall outcomes," says Ayers.

More information on child care programs and services:

http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/childcare/

The Book Corner

Working Families and Growing Kids: Caring for Children and Adolescents
Author: Board on Children, Youth and Families - Institute of Medicine, 2003

Working Families and Growing Kids identifies important opportunities that have the potential to improve the quality of child and adolescent development in this country through new or expanded public policies that respond directly to the conditions shaping America's working families. The book looks at a variety of family and work trends, including the growing population of mothers in the workforce with young children, the increasing reliance on non-parental child care, the significant challenges facing families on welfare, and a better overall understanding of how families and work policies affect child and adolescent development.
-book cover

View the table of contents at:
www.nap.edu/books/0309087031/html/

Provided courtesy of the Health and Human Services Library Serving the Ministries of Human Resources, Children and Family Development, and Health Services.
E-mail: HLTH.Library@gems9.gov.bc.ca

Centre Celebrates a 'Sensational' Milestone

Need some Snoezelen? If you're not sure, you obviously haven't been to North Vancouver lately.

This February marked the first-year anniversary of North Shore ConneXions, a drop-in centre featuring one of the few Snoezelen rooms in Western Canada. More than 100 people attended the anniversary celebration throughout the day.

What is a Snoezelen room? Well, it's something that's easier to experience than describe. In simplest terms, it's a room offering a multi-sensory experience. But there's nothing simple about its benefits, especially for children with autism and other disabilities. Filled with safe sounds, textures, and experiences to engage a person's senses, it can stimulate, calm, relax, energize, and much more.

Fibre optic cables in the Snoezelen room stimulate the senses of sight and touch.

Imagine a dimly lit room with white walls. For your eyes, various moving shapes are projected on the walls, with themes like space, ocean, and forest. To stimulate your sense of smell, aromatherapy is matched to the images. Against one wall is a bean bag chair beating out a tempo, with vibrations that deaf children can enjoy along with everyone else.

And there's more. In the corner is a clear bubble tube, with buttons that let you control the colours shimmering inside, to help develop hand/eye coordination. Nearby there are glowing fibre optic cables hanging from the ceiling that you can grab by the fistful. And in the other corner there's a big bin full of baseball-sized plastic balls that you can immerse yourself in.

Some studies show that multi-sensory stimulation benefits kids with autism, ADHD and other conditions, explains Mary Mullen, director of the North Shore Association for the Mentally Handicapped (NSAMH). "This stimulation really helps them develop and grow," she says.

This room, and the drop-in centre in which it is located, was several years in the planning. NSAMH, along with MCFD and other service providers on the North Shore, worked together to define the vision. NSAMH secured funding through grants from the Vancouver Foundation, Kiwanis, the Variety Club, the Gaming Commission, and general fundraising.

"The centre is about creative ways to deliver service," says Mullen. "It offers a wide range of services and supports, from learning and life-skills, to outings in the community."

In addition to the Snoezelen room, the centre offers numerous programs to children, youth, and adults. Outside groups have been utilizing the centre as well. For example, the school system has booked the Snoezelen room on an ongoing basis, and a Christian group has booked one of the rooms for its own programs.

"The value goes far beyond our sector - which is what we aimed for," says Mullen. "We wanted this to be a drop-in centre for the North Shore, not a drop-in centre exclusively for people with special needs."

For more information about the North Shore Association for the Mentally Handicapped, please visit their website: www.nsamh.org

RELATED LINKS

In this issue, we are focussing on Canadian organizations undertaking research and policy development in the area of children with special needs.

Canadian Institute of Child Health is dedicated to promoting and protecting the health, well-being and rights of all children and youth through monitoring, education and advocacy. www.cich.ca

Centre of Excellence for Children & Adolescents with Special Needs is committed to ensuring that young people with special needs living in rural and northern communities receive the best services Canada has to offer. www.coespecialneeds.ca

Canadian Health Services Research Foundation supports the evidence-based management of Canada's healthcare system by facilitating knowledge transfer and healthcare management and policy. www.chsrf.ca

Canadian Policy Research Networks. One of Canada's leading think-tanks, CPRN specializes in social and economic policy research and public engagement. Their mission is to help make Canada a more just, prosperous and caring society. www.cprn.org

CanChild is a centre for childhood disability research that seeks to maximize life quality of children and youth with disabilities in their families. www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/canchild

The Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis promotes a collegial and supportive interdisciplinary environment that fosters excellence in acquiring, producing and communicating socially-relevant knowledge in the fields of health economics and health policy analysis. www.chepa.org

A Healthy Journey for Aboriginal Families

Its name means "beginning the journey." For the Wazdidadilh Aboriginal Infant and Family Development Program, that journey has been going on for two and a half years. Over that time, the program has been serving as a vital resource for Aboriginal families in Prince George.

Wazdidadilh is just one of 30 separate programs offered by the Prince George Native Friendship Centre (PGNFC). The centre is the largest of its kind in the country, with 150 staff and nine different locations in Prince George. The city is home to many different Aboriginal peoples, including the local Carrier peoples/nations and Metis people.

Wazdidadilh bases itself in Aboriginal culture, and then flows out of a bicultural model.

"We take evidence from early childhood development (ECD) research and try to match it up with what we know as Aboriginal people, because we believe we have understandings that were before science," says Mary Clifford, Director of Health for the PGNFC.

About 100 adults and 100 children participate in Wazdidadilh programs each week. Parenting skills and community awareness are developed through educational workshops, craft making, community kitchen sessions, and cultural events. Connections are made between parents, helping to reduce isolation and enhance self-esteem.

Consultants are available to visit families in their homes. They provide information to parents and can assess infants for developmental delays in areas such as speech, motor, and social skills. Partnerships with companion services offer access to immunizations, screening, public health, and services to children with special needs.

The program's success is reflected in its numbers. In its second year, the program had 130 new referrals of parents and expectant parents, 65 of which were self-referrals.

By helping to build strong families, restore culture, and help people develop real skills, Clifford says programs such as Wazdidadilh have long-term pay-offs. "What we're going to see in the future are healthier families and [fewer] child apprehension cases."

> "We take evidence from early childhood development research and try to match it up with what we know as Aboriginal people."

Clifford credits the program's success to its holistic approach. One component of this approach is looking at things from an Aboriginal perspective using a medicine wheel focus. This means you consider spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical needs.

The approach seems to work well for both clients and staff. It engages staff and taps into their creativity. Clients of the Wazdidadilh program say that they feel like they're visiting a friend's house. Clifford says this is due to the welcoming staff and the way the program integrates best practices for ECD with the traditions and understandings of Aboriginal culture.

An example of this is how the program teaches children to take care of their teeth. The local health unit provides western care, but a Cree language and culture teacher from the PGNC preschool also takes the kids on a medicine walk to one of the local parks.

"She shows how the Cree people have kept their teeth healthy through the years by using a certain bark. She's reminding the children, or maybe having them discover for the first time, how our ways are useful, how we knew about good health and tooth care," Clifford explains.

This seamless integration is built into all aspects of the Wazdidadilh program. More than just being sensitive to the Aboriginal culture, the program is based in the culture. Clients feel the difference.

To learn more about the Prince George Native Friendship Centre, please visit their website: www.pgnfc.com

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

Send comments or content ideas to:

MCF.NewsletterFeedback@gems7.gov.bc.ca

Leading and Learning

A series of Leadership Forums are currently underway for MCFD staff across the province. The sessions, which are hosted by Deputy Minister Alison MacPhail, provide ministry executive with an opportunity to engage in an open dialogue with staff about issues of interest and concern to them. The focus of the sessions is to build and enhance existing leadership throughout the ministry.

Sessions have taken place in Surrey, Vancouver, Kelowna and Prince George. A forum is planned for Nanaimo in April. In total, over 500 individuals are expected to participate.

Alison MacPhail leads a discussion at the Prince George leadership forum.

Through a series of discussions and group exercises, staff share their ideas and suggestions for ways to promote and develop leadership within the organization and identify specific strategies to enhance leading and learning in each region.

Themes from the sessions, as well as strategies to address them, will be summarized and shared with all staff. While the initial sessions are targetted to Managers, Office Managers, Team Leaders and Supervisors, additional sessions will be planned over the coming year that will be open to all staff.

Kudos To...

Rob Smith, Mental Health Youth Clinician for MCFD Squamish Family Services, was one of seven individuals awarded the Order of Squamish in December 2004. His recognition came in the category of Visionary Leadership.

Rob has been described as a constant source of inspiration to his community and his peers. Among his many accomplishments, Rob introduced and championed a program called "Communities That Care" aimed at reducing/eliminating five major health and behaviour problems in adolescents: substance abuse, teen pregnancy, school failure, delinquency and violence.

We are proud to have Rob on the MCFD team!

Peace Arch Community Services (PACS), a social service non-profit organization in White Rock, has just received some unique recognition from the corporate community for its ongoing hard work.

In February, the Surrey Now Readership voted PACS as the Best Community Service Organization, and the White Rock/South Surrey Chamber of Commerce gave PACS the Outstanding Business of the Year 2004 Award.

Learn more about PACS: www.pacsbc.com

Three youth groups were recently presented with the 2004 BC Child and Youth Friendly Communities award. The **New Westminster Youth Advisory Committee,** the **Abbotsford Youth Commission** and the **John Howard Society of North Island** were all commended for their efforts in making their communities more child and youth friendly.

Examples of their wide-ranging efforts include a community bike project, a community kitchen for youth living alone, free recreational programs, art gallery exhibits, and an anti-drinking and driving public service announcement for local radio broadcasts.

These types of projects help build community spirit and involvement on many levels, and are generating momentum for new activities as well.

Learn more: BC Child and Youth Friendly Communities Awards
http://www.scyofbc.org/cyfc_community_action_examples.html

COMING EVENTS

March 21 - 25: Social Work Week

March 30 - 31: Moving Forward - Celebrating the Past ... Embracing the Future Provincial Community Living Services Conference (open to MCFD staff only)

May 4 - 7: Therapeutic Conversations 6, Vancouver. A conference on ethical clinical and social work practice. To register, or for more info, visit therapeuticconversations.com

May 2 - 8: Mental Health Week

May 15: UN International Day of Families

May 24 - 27: Aboriginal Awareness Week

Adoption & Foster Care Information Sessions
Over 1000 children in foster care are waiting for adoptive families. Come out and learn about providing temporary care as a foster family or permanent care as an adoptive parent. Sessions are free but you must pre-register.

Please call 1-877-ADOPT-07 (toll free) for dates & locations near you, or visit our website: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/adoption/events.htm